

Pope asks people of Japan to protect life, ahead of Apostolic Journey

Pope Francis sends a video message to the people of Japan, and urges them to protect all life - symbolized there by cherry blossoms - and to pray for his upcoming Apostolic Journey.

By Devin Watkins

Addressing the Japanese people with “words of friendship”, the Pope recalled the theme of his 23-26 November visit: “Protect All Life”.

In his video message sent on Monday, Pope Francis said this protective instinct resonates in our hearts and is particularly important in light of current threats to peaceful coexistence, especially those posed by armed conflicts.

“Your country is well aware of the suffering caused by war. Together with you, I pray that the destructive power of nuclear weapons will never be unleashed again in human history.”

And to make his point clearer, Pope Francis said:

“The use of nuclear weapons is immoral.”

Dialogue and fraternity

The Holy Father said the people of Japan know the value of dialogue among religious traditions, which he said can “help to overcome division, promote respect for human dignity, and advance the integral development of all peoples.”

He then reflected on the strength of true peace.

“Peace is beautiful. And when it is real, it does not retreat: it defends itself with every ounce of strength.”

Beauty, fragility of life: cherry blossom

Pope Francis said Japan is blessed with “vast natural beauty” which he will have the opportunity to appreciate.

One element of nature that takes on particular significance in Japanese culture, he said, is the cherry blossom, which symbolizes the beauty of life but also its fragility.

Finally, the Pope thanked all those who are preparing for his arrival, and assured everyone of his “heartfelt prayer for each and every one of you.”

Transcript of the Pope’s video message:

Dear friends,

As I prepare for my upcoming visit to Japan, I would like to address to you these words of friendship.

The theme chosen for my visit is "Protect All Life". This strong instinct, which resonates in our hearts – to defend the value and dignity of every human person – takes on particular importance in light of the threats to peaceful coexistence that the world faces today, especially in armed conflicts.

Your country is well aware of the suffering caused by war. Together with you, I pray that the destructive power of nuclear weapons will never be unleashed again in human history. The use of nuclear weapons is immoral.

You also know the importance of a culture of dialogue, of fraternity, especially among different religious traditions, which can help to overcome division, promote respect for human dignity, and advance the integral development of all peoples.

I trust that my visit will encourage you along the path of mutual respect and encounter that leads to a secure and lasting peace, which never turns back upon itself. Peace is beautiful. And when it is real, it does not retreat: it defends itself with every ounce of strength.

I will also have the opportunity to appreciate the vast natural beauty that characterizes your nation, and express our shared desire to promote and strengthen the protection of all life, which includes the earth, our common home, which your culture beautifully symbolizes with cherry blossoms.

I know there are many people who are working to prepare for my visit. I sincerely thank you for these efforts. In the hope that our time together will be rich in grace and joy, I assure you of my heartfelt prayer for each and every one of you.

I ask you, please, to also pray for me. Thank you very much.

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